

**Single Family Design Guidelines Update
Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance Update**

Steering Committee

**Meeting #19 Notes
January 28, 2005**

Steering Committee members: Chair Dianne Channing, Vice Chair Brian Barnwell, Bruce Bartlett, Joe Guzzardi, Vadim Hsu, Bill Mahan, Helene Schneider and Richard Six.

Staff: Jaime Limón (Supervising Planner), Heather Baker (Project Planner) and Jason Smart (Intern).

I. Welcome and Introductions

II. Public Comment for Items Not on the Agenda

Sally Sphar: Second units are important to consider, because the state mandates that every parcel be allowed to have a second dwelling unit. This concept has not been taken into consideration when forming FAR numbers. Second units should be part of the presentation/discussion the next time FARs are discussed.

Richard Ross: Why is the City of Goleta used as a model or reference when determining the City of Santa Barbara's FAR requirements? The word "mansionization" has been demonized. Rather than focus on mansionization, we should focus on what caused bad projects to make it through ABR. The ABR may sometimes make poor decisions. It is possible to build an aesthetically displeasing structure regardless of the guidelines or regulations in place. Many more residents may voice opposition to FARs once they are implemented.

Claudia Madsen: A recent opinion letter printed in the *Santa Barbara News-Press* erroneously said that the City has adopted a .45 FAR. There is also an incorrect rumor that FARs would replace Design Review.

III. Administrative Items

The Steering Committee requested that the upcoming Application Routing and Trigger Mechanisms Issue Paper include information on how each of the committee's proposals thus far would affect the ABR's workload if implemented.

Story Pole Subcommittee: Richard Six reported that draft story pole language had been formed, but input was still needed from Subcommittee members.

FAR Subcommittee: Brian Barnwell said subcommittee members needed to meet one more time to finish revising proposed FAR numbers. Bill Mahan will join Brian Barnwell and Bruce Bartlett on the Subcommittee.

IV. Issue Paper I: Hillside Issues

For each topic, Staff presentation was followed by Steering Committee discussion and public comment.

Hillside Design District:

Public comment included:

Cathie McCammon: High percentage of Neighborhood Visual Survey (NVS) respondents said that all visible alterations should be subject to Design Review. This seems to suggest that current regulations and guidelines are not working. People think the size of homes in hillsides needs to be regulated. It would be more sensible to have a Hillside Design District in which all homes, rather than just those on lots of a certain slope or greater, are subject to Design Review. Current slope measurements are not accurate. Homes on lots of less than 18% slope can still be visible from other areas.

Sally Sphar: In order to approve projects, the ABR must find that trees will be preserved to the maximum extent feasible (Finding 3). This aesthetic goal could conflict with the need to limit brush and trees in order to prevent wildfires.

Kathy Brewster: A Hillside Design District in which Design Review is not dependent on slope would be more equitable. A property adjacent to mine built a huge deck that impacted neighbors' views in an area of less than 18% slope.

The Steering Committee made the following comments regarding the Hillside Design District:

- Findings should be labeled in the Municipal Code, as they are in Issue Paper I, p.4, to improve clarity.
- All significant projects in the Hillside Design District – rather than just those on lots of a certain slope or higher – should be subject to Design Review for the following reasons:
 - The NPO would be simplified.
 - Design Review would be less arbitrary.
 - Piecemeal issues could be resolved.
 - Neighborhood compatibility would be better ensured because neighboring lots would be subject to the same level of design scrutiny.
 - Hillside lots can be highly visible, regardless of the lot's slope; however, the definition of "hillside" needs to be reviewed.
- Support further consideration of Issue Paper I Option C: Reduce the scope of projects subject to ABR review in the Hillside Design District boundaries as part of the Application Routing and Trigger Mechanisms discussion.

Motion (by Helene Schneider): Recommend that projects on all properties within the Hillside Design District be triggered for Design Review, rather than just those on lots of 20% or greater slope (support Option B of Issue Paper I). The District boundaries will be adjusted (support Option A) with consideration of different project routing during the Application Routing and Trigger Mechanisms Issue Paper (Option C).

2nd: Vadim Hsu.

All in favor.

Hillside Spilldown and Revised Height Limits:

Public comment included:

Claudia Madsen: There are three issues within this topic: height, spilldown and amount of grading. These are all dealt with in the general plan. I suggest we create standards to implement the general plan. Ridgeline development and development on slopes greater than 30% should be prohibited.

Kathy Brewster: Supports looking at examples of what appears to be excessive height and/or spilldown, then determining the structures' quantitative characteristics. We need to find out what numbers are needed to ensure that projects are reasonable.

The Steering Committee made the following comments:

- Regarding Option H (change the definition of height to limit the total apparent height of stepped structures): If measuring from the lowest point where a structure meets the ground to the highest point of a structure, a large amount of destructive grading may result because flat building pads will be encouraged. Measuring from natural grade discourages grading and flat roofs.
- Width, not just height, affects the appearance of structures.
- The shape of a lot often determines whether or not a project will have a lot of grading. For example, homes on narrow sites are more likely to spill down a slope.
- FARs could balance out issues of width, height and length. Slope-based FARs could do so on large lots.
- Spilldown can be creative and subjective and thus requires case-by-case analysis.
- The ABR needs strong, written language as a tool to limit height and spilldown.
- If guidelines will be numerous and complicated, Staff assistance will be needed to highlight pertinent issues that require ABR attention.
- Guidelines should be numbered for clarity purposes.
- Specific numbers should be listed in guidelines so that violations of them can be noted by Staff (flagged on ABR agendas, for example) and then emphasized during ABR meetings. Guidelines should make clear that the ABR will focus on guidelines that are not met or are close to not being met.
- A formula could be created linking maximum building allowed height to slope.

Motion (by Richard Six): Support Issue Paper I Option I (create a new Single Family Design Guideline to address hillside spilldown), as follows:

- Change the calculation method for height and/or numbers in the Zoning Ordinance regulating maximum height. Site visits or examples provided by Staff will help to determine the specific changes.
- The draft hillside spilldown guideline on p.11 of Issue Paper I is generally supported, but the specific numbers and wording of the guideline will be further edited after the Steering Committee studies a specific spilldown example.
- When a project approaches or exceeds guideline numbers, Staff will note this and inform the appropriate Design Review Board.
- Options D through H of Issue Paper I will be further considered.

2nd: Bill Mahan.

All in favor.

Bill Mahan volunteered to make sketches based on elevations provided by Staff and present them at the next meeting in order to visually demonstrate different height limits.

The sketches are planned to be shown in the PowerPoint presentation so that the public can view them easily.

Retaining Wall Height:

Public comment included:

Cathie McCammon: Retaining wall color should be addressed. Bright white walls, for example, are aesthetically displeasing.

Claudia Madsen: Supports a standard limiting all retaining walls to 6' in height.

The Steering Committee made the following comments:

- An 8' wall may be acceptable if the materials are aesthetically pleasing (for example, stone), but a 6' height limit is more appropriate for materials such as stucco.
- A retaining wall inside a cut is not as visually disruptive as a retaining wall bounding fill. Issue Paper I Option M (create a Zoning Ordinance standard to limit retaining wall heights visible above finished grade to 8') should be modified to address this.
- Length and width of retaining walls and the distances between retaining walls are important as well.

The Steering Committee requested to see the City of Los Angeles' specific ordinance language banning retaining walls above 12'.

No decision was reached on retaining wall height due to a lack of time; the issue will be discussed further at the next meeting.

V. Review Upcoming Schedule

VI. Adjourn